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PRAYER BOOK CONSULTATION HELD

NEW YORK -- The president of the Conference of Diocesan Liturgical and Music Commissions of the Episcopal Church has accepted an invitation from Presiding Bishop John M. Allin to join in enlisting some others especially concerned with liturgical problems to develop definitive standards for the use of resources from earlier Prayer Books within the framework of the new Standard Book of Common Prayer.

Bishop Allin made his request of the Rev. Canon Vincent Pettit of Cranford, N.J., who is president of the Conference, during a January 31 meeting at the Episcopal Church Center, attended by several bishops and priests.

The meeting was the second informal gathering called by Bishop Allin since the 1979 General Convention. The purpose of both meetings was to deal with problems of differing interpretations of the Convention's resolution adopting the guidelines permitting limited continuing use of the texts of the 1928 Prayer Book. Progress made during the meetings has caused the Presiding Bishop to delay the formation of an Advisory Committee on Prayer Book as approved, if needed, by the House of Bishops in 1979.

The Presiding Bishop requested Canon Pettit to join with him in gathering some persons of diverse points of view in undertaking the task, including some members of the Conference. He also asked that the Standing Liturgical Commission be kept informed of developments.

"We have one Standard Book of Common Prayer and what we do in worship needs to be done within the framework of that book," said Bishop Allin to the gathering. "The General Convention's resolution and guidelines on the Prayer Book do not support the concept of two prayer books existing forever side by side as alternatives. They support the one Standard Book that was adopted and provide for material from previous books to be used within the framework of the Standard Book."

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As an example of how the worship needs of Episcopalians can be met within the framework of the Standard Book of Common Prayer, Bishop Allin noted the rubric on page 14 that permits services, such as ordinations, in the new Standard Book to be celebrated in traditional language rather than in the contemporary idiom when they are celebrated within the context of a Rite One service.

"Many people prefer traditional English," said the Presiding Bishop. "I prefer the older language in reading the Daily Offices. We have provided for this need with a special rubric to incorporate more traditional language into our services as the need arises, and now we need to see how this is done."

The Presiding Bishop expressed his continuing concern for Episcopalians who are having difficulty accepting the new Standard Book of Common Prayer, especially when they are a minority in the midst of a congregation that has largely accepted the new book.

"Many of our people do not know the maximum use that can be made of traditional English within the framework of the new Prayer Book," he commented. "They feel that the only way their needs can be met is through continuing use of the 1928 Prayer Book. I call on every parish priest in this church to exercise the best in pastoral care and understanding toward these people. Taking the attitude that they can be ignored is not good pastoral care."

Bishop Allin added that there has been good pastoral understanding by most bishops in dealing with parish rectors who want to continue for a time some use of the 1928 Prayer Book texts. He said most of the complaints that have come to his office have been from parishioners who feel they have not been understood or accommodated by parish clergy.

"No one can make a rector use the 1928 Prayer Book texts or use any traditional language services at all," said the Presiding Bishop. "The needs I am hearing from lay people would seem to indicate that our rectors should make wider use of the diversity in the new Prayer Book than they are, even though they are not required to do so."

Those attending the January 31 meeting also heard a report based on a recent survey of bishops on how the General Convention resolution and guidelines on the Prayer Book are being implemented in the various dioceses.

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According to the survey, all diocesan bishops see themselves as having liturgical responsibility within their respective dioceses. Responses received reflect a willingness on the part of most bishops to provide special help and understanding where there is a reluctance on the part of parish rectors to use the new Prayer Book, but there is little willingness to let congregations continue use of the 1928 Prayer Book without some plan agreeable to the bishop. No bishop who responded has taken exception to any portion of the General Convention resolution or guidelines and use of the 1928 Prayer Book after Jan. 1, 1980, is regarded as being for the purpose of meeting special pastoral needs.

Meeting with Bishop Allin on January 31 were the Rev. Edward B. Geyer, Jr., of Hartford, Conn., the Rev. K. Logan Jackson of Louisville, Ky., the Very Rev. Edward H. Kryder of Williamsville, N.Y., the Rev. J. William Law of Anchorage, Ky., the Rev. Canon Vincent Pettit of Cranford, N.J., the Rev. William H. Ralston, Jr., of Savannah, Ga., Bishop Otis Charles of Utah, Bishop A. Donald Davies of Dallas, Bishop David B. Reed of Kentucky, Bishop Alexander D. Stewart of Western Massachusetts, Bishop Robert C. Witcher of Long Island, the Rev. Canon James R. Gundrum, Executive Officer of the General Convention and the Rev. Canon Richard J. Anderson, Assistant to the Presiding Bishop.

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